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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 130159

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SUBJECT: BELARUS: AMBASSADOR HINTS AT POLITICAL PRISONER
RELEASES

REF: 07 MINSK 352

Classified By: Deputy Assistant Secretary David J. Kramer,
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1.(C) In a September 12 meeting with DAS David Kramer, the Belarusian Ambassador hinted that a General Amnesty in early October would include some political prisoners. DAS Kramer promised a positive U.S. response after the release of all political prisoners, including Aleksandr Kozulin and the recently convicted Andrey Klimov. At the same time, Kramer told Khvostov the recent flurry of actions against Belarusian opposition and youth activists was a step in the wrong direction if Belarus wanted better relations with the U.S. Kramer warned that additional sanctions were imminent due to Belarus' failure to complete steps that had been discussed during Kramer's April visit to Minsk (reftel). Khvostov defended recent crackdowns on youth activists and complained that Belarus was being singled out among CIS countries for U.S. and EU sanctions. End Summary.

Possible Release of Political Prisoners

2.(C) DAS David Kramer called in Belarusian Ambassador Mikhail Khvostov to register strong USG displeasure at the steady stream of Belarusian human rights violations in recent months. Khvostov hinted to DAS David Kramer that a general amnesty to be approved by parliament when it reconvenes on October 2 would include the release of political prisoners. (Aleksandr Lukashenka submitted the amnesty proposal to parliament on September 7.) Khvostov said he could not make guarantees about any specific person to be amnestied, but only that "you will be happy." Kramer asked Khvostov to inform the USG immediately if he learned that political prisoners would be released, stressing that additional U.S. sanctions were imminent due to Belarus' failure to release political prisoners, as had been discussed during Kramer's April visit to Minsk. From Khvostov's demeanor, it did not appear that all political prisoners would be included in the amnesty.

Minsk Going in Exactly the Wrong Direction

3.(C) Kramer listed for Khvostov some of the more egregious human rights violations which have occurred since the two of them last met on June 28. These included denial of registration to Aleksandr Milinkevich's "For Freedom" movement and the "Young Front" youth activist NGO; police raids on private events and arrests at the performance of a play; forcible arrests of youth at numerous demonstrations; the closed trial and conviction of Andrey Klimov; and threatened liquidation of opposition political parties. Kramer asked Khvostov to inform Minsk

of the USG,s extreme unhappiness and anger with these blatant human rights violations, stressing that if Minsk wants improved relations-- as the U.S. does-- Minsk is going about it exactly wrong. Kramer noted that the USG had expanded the categories of Belarus officials subject to visa restrictions in August, as promised, and would soon put in place additional measures.

Double Standards and Moving the Goal Posts

4.(C) Khvostov complained that the U.S. and EU use a double standard in judging the human rights situation in Belarus. He offered as an example the milder international response when the Presidents in Ukraine and Kazakhstan dissolved their parliaments than when Lukashenka disbanded his parliament in 1996. Khvostov also claimed the U.S. keeps raising the bar for improved relations. The government believes that no matter what it does, it will not be sufficient, so the government has accepted there will be more sanctions from the U.S. and EU.

5.(C) Kramer emphasized that the situation in other countries were not comparable, and that we had been very specific about what actions were necessary as a minimum first step for improved relations, i.e., releasing all political prisoners, including Aleksandr Kozulin and the recently convicted Andrey Klimov, and dropping politically motivated charges against the opposition. Kramer said the USG would immediately respond to improve relations if

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Belarus took these steps, and he predicted the EU would do the same.

"If it weren't for those pesky kids. . ."

6.(C) In defense of recent actions by Belarus security forces, Khvostov claimed "it was the same people involved, mostly young people, teenagers." Accusing them of "underground activity," Khvostov asked for the U.S. and EU to stop financing the young people "who are trying to change things." Khvostov asserted they should use legal procedures instead, "like elections" to effect change. Khvostov also claimed that decisions on sentences were made independently by the courts. Kramer was emphatic in response, stressing that the U.S. would continue to support democracy and youth groups, and that the implementation of Belarus laws infringes on people,s human rights.

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